



# SPRING UPDATE

COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY

## HEAD'S MESSAGE

Dear Commonwealth Families and Friends,

Settling back into the routine of school after Spring Break is always a process, but students (and teachers) are now back in full swing, as are our busy schedules. Just before the break, Commonwealth families, friends, elected officials, and business leaders joined together for our Annual CARE Awards dinner with a record crowd of 165 attendees. You'll find more details on page 4 of this newsletter. And, upon returning, we hit the ground running, preparing bi-weeklies, attending to details for our rescheduled Spring Family Day, and preparing for the Science Fair, which was held last week.

With just under six weeks of school left, we have much to do and many activities to look forward to, including performances by the middle and high school students, the Art and Poetry show, our first-ever alumni gathering and the prom.

Our Seniors are busy finalizing post-graduation plans. Most of our students have received multiple acceptances, some with sizeable scholarships. With their eyes on graduation day, many find it difficult to maintain their usual focus, just as we did at their age. As we continue to enhance our curriculum, we will be working this summer on plans for a senior internship during the second semester. We would like to place seniors in offices or charities in which they are interested. We believe this opportunity will be mutually beneficial as students explore areas of interest, acquire hands-on work experience in an office environment, and help out at local organizations. If you know of any organizations that might be interested in partnering with us, please contact me.

Because of the great success of both our Annual Fund and Awards dinner, our goal of building a state-of-the-art science lab will become a reality this summer. Plans have been finalized and construction is scheduled to start in June. We'll keep you posted about our progress throughout the coming months.

We are also launching a Summer Writing Workshop, open to students in grades 6 – 12, and will be hosting the Lindamood Bell Reading Program, offered through Reston Speech and Language. You'll find more details about the programs on our website. Visit the homepage and click on "Summer Offerings."

As always, I hope you find this edition of the *Commonwealth Academy Update* informative and look forward to your continued ideas and suggestions.

Warm regards,

Susan J. Johnson, PhD  
Head of School

EMPOWER THE CHILD. EMPOWER THE MIND.

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

5/10	STUDENT/FACULTY SOCCER GAME
5/13	PROM
5/24	HIGH SCHOOL PLAY
5/26	ART & POETRY SHOW
5/29	MEMORIAL DAY
6/1	MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAY
6/8	LAST DAY OF SCHOOL
6/9	GRADUATION



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Donald C. Klawiter, *Chair*
- Diana A. Horvat, *Vice Chair*
- Walter R. "Trip" Howell III, *Treasurer*
- Julie B. Goodale, *Secretary*
- Susan J. Johnson, PhD, *Head of School*
- Marilyn S. Burroughs
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*Commonwealth Academy helps capable students who better benefit from small classes and those with learning disabilities or ADHD succeed in a college preparatory curriculum through accommodations and technology within a challenging academic and socially supportive environment.*

## Commonwealth Academy Named Finalist in 10th Annual Alexandria Technology Achievement Award

Technology is so much a part of our everyday life at Commonwealth Academy, we sometimes take it for granted. But earlier this year, we reviewed in-depth the numerous ways we use technology to enhance learning at CA in order to enter the Alexandria Technology Achievement Awards, sponsored by the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and the City of Alexandria. The list is truly impressive:

Last summer, we installed more than 40 desktop computers in three computer labs to ensure access during the school day for any student who wants or needs to use this tool. On any given day, you'll find students doing homework in one of labs, or teachers conducting class in another.

We have SMARTBoards in 9 of 11 classrooms. An advanced, interactive teaching tool, SMARTBoards allow teachers to better engage students in daily discussions and activities. Whether playing Spanish Jeopardy or classifying plants in biology, SMARTBoards help students stay focused, know what's coming next in the lesson, get physically involved in the lesson as well as mentally, and minimize the need to take laborious notes.

Kurzweil voice recognition software, Inspiration, and Text-Help are other important tools we use. Students can upload, key or scan materials into their computers—from papers they're working on to entire textbooks—and have the material read to them at the speed most conducive to learning. They can highlight important passages from textbooks for later import into a paper they're writing, answer questions directly on the computer to demonstrate mastery of the subject, or use dictation to maximize their output.

Our curriculum is also rich in courses utilizing technology: web design and development, computer programming, and robotics. And this year, we've conducted a successful test of paperless classrooms (see page 6).

Technology also provides us with numerous avenues for communication with families. Report cards and homework are posted on line so both parents and students can keep abreast of their progress. Our website, revamped this year, provides both current and prospective families with up-to-date information about our school and activities. And out-bound emails and AlertNow are key vehicles for frequent communication with students and parents.

Although we didn't "bring home the gold" in the awards



*Dr. Johnson accepts finalist award on behalf of Commonwealth Academy at the recent Alexandria Technology Achievement Awards luncheon.*

competition, we were honored to be named one of five finalists, in the company of G2Tactics, Inc., Cambridge Communication Systems, Inc., H2Gen Innovations, Inc., and TranTech, Inc. The month-long celebration of technology in Alexandria gave our school numerous opportunities for greater exposure in the community, including an appearance by Dr. Johnson on cable television; a video of how Commonwealth uses technology, prepared by students at T.C. Williams; and several gatherings of local business leaders. The Technology Awards culminated in a luncheon held on March 24th at which Mayor Euille presented the finalists awards, and named G2Tactics the winner of the competition.

We take great pride in this recent honor and thank the entire Commonwealth community for making it possible. The ongoing and generous financial support of so many families and friends enables us to continue to purchase the state-of-the-art equipment and software that is so important to our students' success.

**Have you visited the Commonwealth Academy website recently? If not, be sure to log on for current news, photos of students, alumni and community information:**

[www.CommonwealthAcademy.org](http://www.CommonwealthAcademy.org)

## NEW FACES: A PASSION FOR WRITING & RIDING

Maine license plates and a UNH window sticker were our first introduction to Janet Gratton. That was in September. In March, students are overwhelmingly happy she joined Commonwealth with unsolicited comments such as, "I love Ms. Gratton."

Ms. Gratton teaches Literary Genres, 9th and 10th grade Writing, and launched our newest club this year, The Horsemanship Club, which gained immediate popularity. Students ride at Rock Creek Horse Center in DC on Wednesdays from 2:45 to 4:45. Ms. Gratton takes ten students and while one half rides, the other half are in the classroom learning about horse care, basic parts, tack, etc. The students are focusing on English/hunt seat. Students compiled folders of all they have learned; at the end of the twelve week session they will have very nice booklets to present. Ms. Gratton is also planning a "graduation" where each rider will present their horse, talk about what they have learned, and give a riding demonstration for parents and friends.

Ms. Gratton grew up in New Hampshire; her parents and younger brother are all educators in different capacities. She has been an equestrian since she was eight years old, having spent much time competing and practicing. Her awards are numerous in Hunt Seat Equitation ("how you look" while riding). Her horse, Bailey, is boarded in New Hampshire by a trusted friend.

College brought Ms. Gratton to the University of New Hampshire, where she majored in English and minored in Theatre/ Education. She came to Commonwealth with four years experience teaching English: one in New Hampshire and the balance in DC. She is still in touch with many of her stu-

dents; some plan to become teachers themselves. Ms. Gratton spent a year intensively working on her Masters of Arts in Teaching at Trinity University while working part-time before landing at Commonwealth. She has also coached track & field and tennis.

In the summer, Ms. Gratton enjoys teaching theatre at the Potomac School's summer camp. Her puppy Rosie, a boxer mix, commands her attention at home. Her favorite summertime haunt is Kennebunkport, Maine, where Mom and Dad currently reside.

(Below) Janet Gratton in classroom.



## COMMONWEALTH NEWS IN BRIEF..

### SGA HAT DAY RAISES MONEY FOR CANCER RESEARCH

The SGA sponsored a hat day during which students paid to wear a hat in school. \$120 from the proceeds went to the National Cancer Institute for research in childhood cancer. The SGA has been actively raising funds for a variety of school projects and activities such as the Prom and the Senior Gift. In addition to the Five Guys on Fridays, the SGA has also raised money through a phone and ink cartridge recycling program. Thank you to all who contributed especially **Mrs. Katz** who has gone above and beyond to keep us busy. We have mailed off about twelve large boxes of cell phones and ink cartridges.

### MENTORING PROGRAM

Several high school students are earning community service hours by participating in a new mentoring program, similar to a Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Students will act as mentors to middle schoolers providing a friendly contact, role model, or tutor. A training program is headed by **Mr. Baber** and **Alexis Hershall**, a social work intern from Catholic University. The program will soon be offered to our middle school students as well.

*Continued page 7*

## CALLING ALL ALUMNI!

Our first-ever alumni event is scheduled for May 26. All alumni are invited to attend the Annual Poetry and Art show and an informal gathering of alumni afterwards. Tentative plans are to meet at Fast Eddy's on Route 1 in Alexandria to enjoy fellowship, pool, snacks and games.

Once plans are finalized, we'll send invitations with times and other details. In the meantime, we are trying to collect names, addresses and email addresses of all Commonwealth alumni. If you can help us locate CA alumni, please contact **Joanna Burstein** at 703.548.6912 or log onto our website. You'll find an email link on the alumni page that provides an Alumni Information form.

## Development Update

### Annual Fund

A big THANK YOU goes to current and past parents of Commonwealth for the terrific show of support for our first ever, formal Annual Fund at CA. Because of you, the Annual Fund drive is an unqualified success. We have already raised \$40,000; well beyond our original goal for the school year. The participation rate, while not yet at goal, clearly demonstrates that Commonwealth parents love their school! Funds will help to complete the science lab renovations that will take place this summer. Students will return in September to two large workstations, each for five students, equipped with gas and water. The lab will also house an eye-wash station, microscopes and other equipment.

If you haven't already made your gift, contributions of any size may be added to the 2005-06 Annual Fund through June 30, 2006. Higher parent participation rates in the Annual Fund may help us to secure funding from local and national foundations for the expansion and growth projected for 2006-07.

### CARE Awards Dinner Nets \$95,000

The 6th Annual CARE Awards Dinner took place on April 4, 2006 with a record-breaking 165 people in attendance. The site, kindly donated by the **Gallup Organization**, through CA parents **Becky and Steve O'Brien**, (Nick '06) was beautifully decorated with white roses and votive candles at each table, (donated by DC florist, **Le Printemps**). Local photographer **Steve McElwaney** also donated his time to Commonwealth for the evening.

The event was hosted by past parent **Rich Carroll**, (Jeff '05) and celebrity host, former Redskins defensive cornerback, **Darrell Green**. Mr. Green was overheard telling a CA student not to put pictures of athletic heroes on their walls just because of their accomplishments in their sport, but to make sure they were also good people, doing good things with their off-team lives as well....good advice for all of us.

In attendance that evening were four Congressional representatives and **Mayor Euille** of Alexandria, each of whom presented an award to an educator from their district who,

"in the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act, has significantly contributed to the academic success of students with learning differences." Each award recipient had numerous past achievements that qualified them for this award. Recipients included **Susan Bailey-Scott** who teaches Algebra to a largely disadvantaged student population at Ruffner Academy in Norfolk and tries to show her students "that there is a way out of their current situation and education is the ticket; **Nancy Campbell** who teaches at an all boys' high school on the grounds of the juvenile detention center of her school district in Nebraska and has devoted much of her personal life to volunteer work for children with learning differences; **Michael Goodman**, the Instructional Technology Coordinator at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington who helped organize "An Adventure of the American Mind" program at his school; **Jenell Pezzulich**, a ninth grade science teacher at Minnie Howard School in Alexandria who has a particular interest in working with students who have behavioral disabilities; and **Dell Rovanssek** from Bonnie Brae Elementary School in Fairfax who has been teaching for 21 years and has extensive experience with special needs students.

The dinner was also an opportunity to honor members of our immediate community. **Kat Frazier** was awarded the Teacher of the Year Award and **Trip and Chris Howell** were recognized with Commonwealth Academy's Citizen of the Year Award.

Thanks to the generosity of many Commonwealth families and local business leaders, the CARE Awards Dinner netted \$95,000. Part of the monies will be combined with Annual Fund proceeds to fund the science lab renovation. Some monies will go toward professional development; a critical tool for our teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest education theory and teaching strategies. Any additional funds will be used to help provide tuition assistance to families who otherwise would not be able to afford to have their student attend Commonwealth.

### CARE AWARD PHOTOS

❶ Dave Dempsey (Jones, Lang LaSalle), Board Member Trip Howell, Mayor Euille. ❷ Board Member Kathleen Criner (Kip '03), Celebrity Host Darrell Green. ❸ Commonwealth parents Bill & Terry Witowski (Kelly '09). ❹ Pam Braden (Gryphon Technologies). ❺ Head of School Dr. Susan Johnson, Teacher of the Year Kat Frazier, Celebrity Host Darrell Green. ❻ Board Chair Don Klawiter, Citizens of the Year Trip & Chris Howell (Ian '07). ❼ Congressman Tom Osborne, CARE Award Recipient Nancy Campbell. ❽ Dinner Host Rich Carroll (Jeffrey '05), Celebrity Host Darrell Green. ❾ Tracey McCormick and Cynthia Reiss (SAIS) ❿ Nic Karangelen (Trident Systems).

To view additional photographs of the CARE Awards Dinner, please visit [www.CommonwealthAcademy.org](http://www.CommonwealthAcademy.org) and click on Photo Gallery. Prints may be ordered online.



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# The Paperless Classroom: An Interview with Natalie Privette

As more and more colleges are testing the effectiveness of paperless classrooms, Commonwealth Academy's Natalie Privette designed our first paperless classroom this summer and has had great success. This is Ms. Privette's second year at Commonwealth Academy; she teaches Chemistry, Biology, Pre-Algebra, Statistics, Introduction to Computer Sciences and Robotics.

**Q. Why did you decide to test a paperless classroom?**

A. It seems like that's where the future of education is going. Lots of colleges and some high schools are trying it out. I hoped it would help students' organizational process so they wouldn't lose papers, etc., give them a deeper understanding of technology and help them be more comfortable with a variety of programs like Excel. And it gives parents an opportunity to look at assignments online.

**Q. Which classes do you teach "paperless"?**

A. Chemistry, biology, statistics and robotics.

**Q. How does a paperless classroom work?**

A. Textbooks are the one paper-based thing. Research said it's best to have a tangible object, so I kept the textbook paper-based. Everything else is done paperless. Lectures are done through the SMARTboard. Students download assignments on Edline or on Quia.

**Q. What have you found to be the key benefits?**

A. As expected, it has helped a great deal with organization. Students are also learning different software programs in addition to their lessons. They can organize their thoughts better using inspiration; organize text better. Note taking is easier too. All students take notes on their computer and can access lecture notes and assignments online.



**Q. Does the paperless classroom change how students interact with you?**

A. I haven't seen changes there. Students don't email me that much; they still ask questions in class. Initially, most of the questions were about how to use programs.

**Q. How have students reacted to the paperless classroom?**

A. Initially, it was hard for them to get used to testing online. But now a lot of them really like it. Open ended questions are easier for them on the keyboard.

**Q. What do you see as the future of the paperless classroom at Commonwealth?**

A. I'm really happy I did it and will plan paperless classrooms next year. It's a learning process for both the students and teacher but has great advantages. Things we thought we couldn't do online, we can. Ideally, I'd like to have tablets one day, which are necessary for math and chemistry, and have all classes paperless.



## HONOR ROLL

Congratulations to first semester honor roll students:

Andrew Brynczak '09

Harry Canon '11

Brian Dooley '06

Felipe Gomez-Acebo '09

Jack Hazard '07

Richie Klein '09

Max Kosma '11

Patrick Lewis '10

Margaret McCracken '11

Noah McGrath '09

Megan Nadeau '09

Izac Ross '06

Ryan Travis '11

Honor Roll is awarded to all students who earn a B or better in every class. High Honor Roll is awarded to students who earn straight A's.



## KAYAK PROJECT

Our 20-foot Inuit Kayak is nearly complete. With the assistance of **Joe Youcha**, Director of Alexandria Sea-port Foundation, we have measured, marked, cut, chiseled, hammered, screwed, lashed and steamed ribs. Students have also researched the Inuit culture and history and made contact with a middle school class near the Artic center and a 7th grade class at Aqsnariit Middle School in Iqaluit, Nunavut. When not working on the kayak the team builders have watched "Snow Walker" an exciting movie filmed in the Nunavut Territories.

## FIELD TRIPS

- Senior Government students spent half a day completing a Service Learning project with a local political party. This experience provided a mutual benefit for the seniors who learned about the workings of local political parties and the party who received support in completing its campaign goals. Ultimately, the experience provided the students with a supported community service project that increased their opportunity to engage in active learning.
- The 8th grade Civics classes, 11th grade US History classes, and 12th grade US/VA Government classes went on a field trip to Washington, DC. The students began the day by touring the White House and visiting the White House Visitor Center. The classes then viewed the numerous historical documents at the National Archives. Last, the students went to the Smithsonian American History museum and viewed the American Presidency exhibit, Brown v. Board of Education exhibit, and finished with a tour of the American War exhibit.
- Mr. Lamm's** Conceptual Physics class and **Mrs. Mazhari's** Geometry class joined forces at Fast Eddie's Pool Hall in Alexandria to test out a few theories

and practical applications of their studies. Lunch and pool left them full and academically satisfied.

- Physics students spent Science Day at Six Flags where they studied the science of roller coasters.

## NEW YORK/PHILADELPHIA TRIP

Commonwealth revisited New York City and spent two nights enjoying the sights, dining at Times Square and watching *Spamalot* the Tony winning play. After arriving in New York, we made a brief visit to the National Museum of Natural History and watched a new movie at the Planetarium. The second day began with a bus tour of New York with stops at Central Park, the World Trade Center, shopping in Chinatown and lunch in Greenwich Village. Then it was off to the battery, a trip past the Statue of Liberty to Ellis Island, a subway ride back to Times Square, dinner, shopping, a long walk to the Rockefeller Center where we went to the "Top of the Rock" and saw all of New York at night. It was quite a day! The next day we left for Philadelphia where we saw Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell and the new interactive National Constitution Center. Pictures are available on our website.

## CAPA

Last weekend, we held our annual Spring Festival. The Festival included our Car Wash, food, Margarita Man Smoothie machine, raffle baskets and a Teacher Auction. Students won tickets to enter the Super Student raffle for a \$100 gift card to Best Buy. One of the most exciting new events at the Spring Festival was our Teacher Auction. The CA Staff generously offered lunches, one-on-one basketball games, shopping trips, movies, a kayaking trip and a day at the Speedway. Parents had the opportunity to win text

## High School Students Redefine Shakespeare Comedy

Parents, friends and fellow students enjoyed an evening of hilarity and superb acting as the high school students performed two one-act comedies directed by Miss Frazier, *All's Well that Ends Wrong* and *A Danish Soap* on January 26th. The next production, scheduled for May 24th, is *The Prisoners of Hazelton Avenue*, a "figure it out" comedy that might have you surprised by its conclusion, and a hysterical television spoof with over twenty parts titled *Puberty: The Game Show*. Drama is a year long elective class. Everyone participates in all of the productions and has at least one part in each play. Those students with small parts support their peers through studying lines, working on blocking, bringing in props and helping with set design.



## New York/Philadelphia Trip



## NEWS IN BRIEF, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

books and planners for next year. The **Johnson family** (Sarah '09) donated an inner tubing trip and picnic on their farm in Front Royal.

Thanks to all of the CA families who made the festival possible, and to those who have donated food for the Teacher Appreciation Lunches and other events this year, and helped with driving students here and there.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Prom plans are underway. The Prom will be held on Saturday, May 13, from 7pm - 11pm. Tickets are \$65 per person, which includes dinner. There will be dancing, games and prizes. Students and **Ms. Litvak** are busy making plans for decorations for this year's underwater theme.
- Middle schoolers will present two plays on June 1 in the multipurpose room: *Three Samurai Cats* and *Pine Trees for Sale*. Both are Japanese stories.

*Many thanks to our contributing writers and photographers.*

Rod Baber, Mary Chamberlain  
Peg DiGiammarino, Kat Frazier,  
Jolene Irvine

Shirley Edelman, Mari Foret  
Susan Johnson, David Roth

The "Commonwealth Academy Update" is published three times each year by the Communications office. If you have any news of interest to share with the community, please email your stories, ideas or photographs to:

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CommonwealthAcademy.org*